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AUTHOR Brickell, Edward E.; Jones, Nancy T.
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ABSTRACT

The Virginia Beach (Virginia) Public School Division, which has a fairly large student population of 55,500 students, has enjoyed strong community support over the last 2 years for its newly instituted comprehensive curriculum assessment and development project. The project's goal of attaining educational improvement in all areas from kindergarten through grade 12 has been aided by 5 full-time professionals and a 36-member task force of students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Since its inception in 1981, the project has been entirely locally funded and controlled. The task force's recently completed final recommendations include emphasis on communicative competencies, such as reading and writing; increased support of mathematics and science; and plans for continuing curriculum development. A task force statement on philosophical goals, stressing commitment to excellence and greater expectations of students, has been adopted by the school board. The study's comprehensive curriculum plan anticipates developments over the next 10 to 20 years and focuses on 4 principal areas, including learning skills and processes and graduation standards. Community involvement was obtained through numerous small discussion groups and Parent Teacher Association (PTA) conducted surveys. The final report's 135 recommendations include raising academic standards and giving higher priority to interdisciplinary studies, writing, and computer literacy. (JBM)

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67th ANNUAL CONFERENCE
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS
Dallas, Texas
February 4 - 8, 1983

"Curriculum Renewal: A Comprehensive Assessment and Development Program" (Remarks condensed from tape of session in Dallas)

Chairman - William Georgiades, Dean, College of Education, University of Houston, Houston, Texas

Speakers: Edward E. Brickell, Superintendent of Schools, Virginia Beach Public Schools, Virginia Beach, Virginia

Nancy T. Jones, Staff Assistant, Curriculum Assessment and Development, Virginia Beach Public Schools, Virginia Beach, Virginia

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Introductory Remarks

The quality of American secondary education has been strengthened over the years through a variety of grants, such as the Ford Foundation Grant and the Danforth Foundation Grant. We make infinitesimally small micro-contributions to the forward thrust of schooling in this country; eventually, we begin to see more potent results. Virginia Beach Schools have been working to develop a quality system of schooling for the next century.

Remarks by Dr. Brickell

I am delighted to see so many people talking about curriculum change and curriculum renewal. After going through the process and determining the recommendations, it is obvious that putting these things into effect and establishing some kind of evaluation system to measure the results of all of this activity are the true tests. We find that we keep coming back to identify the people who will see that the job is done. The answer is clear to us that the key person is the principal.

We have believed for a long time in Virginia Beach that curriculum is the heart and soul of schooling. We have committed all of the same sins that most of you have in the last thirty years trying to bring to all of our students that which we thought was the best kind of education program. We have committed many follies, and we have been involved in a number of things that we wish we had not started. We think we have pinpointed the reasons for some of our not too successful projects, and we set about this one in a way that we hoped would ensure the absolute maximum potential for success.

From the onset of the project we made the assumption that there is one thing that we must have in our professional school people, and that is visionary leadership -- leadership, in this case, that occurs through strategic curriculum planning. We also decided that curriculum is a matter for public policy and public involvement. We know that we can dictate and decree, but change may or may not happen. The community, and more particularly the staff, must be involved in this process.

The Virginia Beach Public School Division is a fairly large system -- about 55,500 students -- and we are in a rapid-growth area. There were only about 25,000 students fifteen years ago. As a result, much of our time was taken up with providing buildings for this amount of growth. I would be less than candid if I did not say that as Superintendent I had some higher priorities than curriculum planning. The management side of education can sometimes elbow out of the way some of the important things that should be done.

We have a very interested and a very supportive community. The community approves of the schools. We recently did a very broad-based survey and 67 percent of the respondents gave an "A" or "B" grade to the local schools, compared to the 29 percent that we found in the Gallup polls. 75 percent of the respondents in Virginia Beach felt that good schools were very important to attracting new residents and new businesses to the community. We started into public involvement with a bit of a plus.

About three years ago, I began to give some serious consideration to our curricular direction. How were our schools going to get there? How would we know when we got there? I talked to many fine curriculum theorists and practitioners. Then, around a year and a half ago, I made a presentation to the School Board on the initiation of an important activity that was to become the Curriculum Assessment and Development Project. The Board bought in very quickly and gave us funding for a two-year study.

We established the Office of Curriculum Assessment and Development with five full-time professionals. In Virginia Beach, most of our long-term planning has been done as assigned corollary duties to people who already have too much to do. The committees have to meet at odd times. We did not want to go into this particular project in that way. We gave the very highest priority we had to the effort to improve the <u>quality</u> of education in the Virginia Beach City Public Schools.

This is a comprehensive study -- a kindergarten through grade twelve perspective. We do not believe that developing more effective schools for the future can be approached solely from the elementary, the secondary, or even the college perspective. There seems to be an almost natural conflict between academic and vocational, language arts and social studies. Clearly, we are limited in some ways by the length of the school day, and every discipline wants its share of that time. These turf quarrels and other unavoidable constraints insert themselves into curricular decision making. We also had to give consideration to special needs -- remediation, special education, and education for the gifted and talented. We felt that we needed to study all subject areas in relationship to each other and look at every aspect of the program.

The key to the entire project so far has been the tremendously meaningful participation of school personnel and community members. Our thirty-six member task force included students, parents, teachers, and school administrators. Over a hundred and fifty meetings were held with citizen, staff, and student groups. We held three major public hearings. We simply said to the public, "Come out and tell us what you think of our schools. You don't have to have a rationale. You don't have to prove anything. Just tell us what you would like to see changed." We were very pleasantly surprised by the number of persons who spoke at the hearings and by the positive comments. Even in the midst of the depression/recession, even when people were concerned about keeping taxes down, they asked for more schooling and more education.

We attempted to focus on what students ought to learn and to go beyond mere tinkering with course sequences. We looked at the content and intent of courses as part of the total education of students. The comprehensive process has mobilized school personnel and community members as contributing participants. I feel confident that the climate has been prepared for change; people have expectations for improvement. People now say, "When are we really going to change?" instead of, "Do we have to change?" We are on the verge of moving very rapidly in the direction that the board decides.

Because of major changes in American society, there is a strong need for renewal in our schools. We need visionary leadership to develop clear goals for schooling, and we need to talk about the difference between schooling and education. If we use the resources that we have and use them well, we can support innovations and inspire people through the quality of our ideas. Mere direction simply will not be sufficient. There must be quality to our ideas and to our leadership.

Text of Slide-Tape Program (Twelve minutes)

Children born during the past year will be in the first graduating class of the twenty-first century. What will they need to know? What skills must they have?

It is inevitable that the twenty-first century will be dominated by video and computer technologies and a phenomenal expansion of knowledge. No longer will knowledge be contained simply in textbooks; no longer will teachers be the only keepers of the intellectual store of this nation.

Preparing students for this age demands curriculum reform, and there has never been a better time than the 1980s to begin. Indeed, several major national curriculum projects are exploring a redefinition of general education in American society. The Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the College Board are among those sponsoring studies of educational purpose. These studies are responding to the growing national concern for increased quality in schooling.

Education has lost a degree of credibility with the public, just as have many other institutions. Nationwide, media attacks have helped erode public commitment to education and declining fiscal support from all sources burdens schools even more. The cry to do more with less is heard throughout the land, despite an inherent lack of logic in that cry.

What is needed is creativity. What is required are innovative answers to age-old challenges in education. The central concern of the Curriculum Assessment and Development Project of Virginia Beach City Public Schools is to meet those challenges. Thus, the project is among those on the leading edge of shaping new directions for American public education.

Virginia Beach began to examine priorities for curriculum and instruction in July of 1981. Virginia Beach Division Superintendent, Dr. E. E. Brickell, began by directing that the project begin at

ground zero by focusing on two basic questions for the future: "What kind of person do we want to produce? What knowledge will be of most worth?" To answer these questions, curricular issues had to become matters of public concern.

Since then, hundreds of large and small group meetings have been held with school system personnel, with students, and with community leaders. Three well-publicized and well-attended public hearings on curriculum were held in key geographic locations throughout the sprawling city of Virginia Beach. Parents, interested community members, and even students seized the opportunity to express their concern. Major advisory committees and a task force were formed to study issues and ideas, and to develop options. Again, extensive efforts were made to include students, the community, and staff. A thirty-six member task force includes representation from these major groups. Also, it is the responsibility of this task force to shape final recommendations for the study.

Colleges and universities were visited to determine both the capabilities and the needs of recent graduates of Virginia Beach high schools. Employers were contacted for information, concerns, and ideas. A Citizen Advisory Group was formed that draws its representation from such diverse community interests as labor, military, and business. Exemplary school systems throughout the United States were visited to examine their programs and practices. Virginia Beach City Public School System staff members, including teachers, building level, and central office employees, and School Board members were involved in those trips. Key state and national educational leaders shared ideas and perspectives with the project team and task force, adding another dimension to the study.

Several distinctive characteristics of the project mark it as unusual, particularly for a single school division to undertake. First, it is funded entirely at the local level and maintains local control in curricular decision making, while recognizing the national perspective. Its structure promotes a high level of interaction and dialogue among all employees of the school system, while at the same time extensively involving the general public on matters of curriculum. Built into the project are various methods to provide information concerning the total educational process to both the public and to staff members. Broad, long-range curricular questions continue to be examined in detail, and the current curriculum from kindergarten through grade twelve was studied comprehensively, with particular emphasis on the interrelationship of subjects.

Final recommendations of the task force are nearly complete. They will go to the Division Superintendent in March for later presentation to the School Board.

From the beginning of the project, certain key elements began to emerge as consistent concerns for the Curriculum Assessment and Development Team and Task Force to consider.

- A concern that the essential communication competencies -- reading, writing, speaking, and listening -- must continue to be emphasized, and that an increased place of importance must be given math and science in our technological world.

- A concern for the present and increasing impact of mass media, computers, and other information systems, and for increased emphasis for the teaching of thinking skills.

- A concern that more consistency in instructional delivery among courses and grade levels is needed, as well as better quality control and management of both instructional process and instructional product.

- A concern for greater staff development efforts that are directly linked to curriculum management and instructional improvement and for more development of interdisciplinary thinking, planning, and teaching.

- A concern that a clear definition of the role and goals of the public school must be communicated to the public to include clear expectations of the students, the school, the home, and the community.

- A concern for a continuing comprehensive approach to all curriculum development activities, and a concern that more rigorous academic and behavioral standards must be adopted for all students.

With those concerns to guide them, the task force developed a philosophy and goals statement for the school system, which has been recently adopted by the School Board. The statement commits Virginia Beach City Public Schools to excellence in education and charts a course toward high expectations for all students. It also provides a foundation for the comprehensive recommendations to follow.

These are lofty, although attainable, goals, and it will take time, energy, and resources to reach them. The Virginia Beach City Public Schools' Curriculum Assessment and Development Project has found to be true what educators have always suspected, or at least hoped -- that the quality of public education is a total community concern.

Preparing to meet the challenge of the twenty-first century has united staff, students, and community in efforts to strengthen schools. In doing so, the quality of life for all has been enhanced.

Remarks by Dr. Jones

The purpose of this curriculum study has been to assess the current curriculum in relationship to the future needs of our students. The study has resulted in a comprehensive report on curriculum that presents a total view of the best plan for curriculum for our system over the next ten to twenty years. The task force has not been idealistic. They have tried to achieve balance and to develop a picture of curriculum for the future that is both reasonable and achievable.

The project began with the definition of four areas for in-depth study.

- First, we needed to look at the whole area of philosophy and respond to the question, "What kind of person do we want to produce?" Much has been written recently about narrowing the

focus of schooling. There have been cautions about over-emphasis on the basics -- about losing sight of the school's role in producing educated persons who are able to continue to learn throughout life. The existing philosophy for Virginia Beach seemed to have little effect on the actual direction of curriculum. We wrote a new philosophy that is brief -- just three paragraphs and twelve statements of goals. It can be a useful filter for further development, providing greater cohesion within the program.

- The second major question concerned, "What knowledge is of most worth?" A study group looked at the essentials of schooling and developed a report that describes the essentials of curriculum that cross grade levels and subject areas. These essentials include learning skills and processes -- those generative tools that all students must have in order to learn and to continue learning effectively -- and five broad curriculum areas that describe a common body of knowledge for all students.

- In a third area, standards, a number of concerns were expressed. The community was concerned that students were not taking full advantage of the opportunities offered to them. Secondary teachers and administators were concerned about graduation requirements. Students, of course, were concerned about equity in grading and about how their grades were communicated to colleges and employers. Parents wanted clear information about requirements and options.

- The fourth area for research was futures. We conducted a study of possible futures and proposed nine major educational implications that needed to be reflected in the recommendations of the task force.

The project had two goals in addition to simply studying curriculum. The whole program needed to be looked at comprehensively and the total community needed to be involved. The approach used to accomplish these two goals was based on a belief that better qualitative information can be gained through small group discussions, than through other, more objective, means. The process of building consensus in small groups eliminated many of the single viewpoint issues that would typically emerge and distract from the major questions. The staff development benefits of small group discussions were also important. Individuals from various levels and subjects discussed important topics and agreed on recommendations to the task force. This was an invaluable aid in preparing a climate for change within our school system.

We also used a number of more formal information and involvement tools. For example, PTA volunteers recently conducted a telephone survey of 600 homes in the Virginia Beach community. A series of brief questions were asked in relation to the central issues of the report -- graduation requirements, computer literacy, full day of school, increased math and science requirements, and several other areas. In general, the community supported the central directions, establishing a positive climate for change.

Sometimes we thought we should have used a more quantitative approach that included more surveys and objective data. It would have been easier. The problem is that it would have forced us to make some early decisions about the kinds of questions that should be asked. The key that enabled us to take the time needed for intense, individual involvement was the long-term commitment from the School Board.

It has been important to look at the national picture. Although we have strongly maintained the need for local decision making on these curriculum matters, there have been a number of studies that have great potential for nationwide curriculum renewal. In many cases, recommendations from our study support, and are supported by, recommendations that we expect to be forthcoming from the national projects.

An important element in the project has been openness. A reporter has attended all task force meetings and our media coverage has been very good. This involved risk-taking, but in this case it has paid off. You can chronicle the history of the project through articles in the local and regional newspapers.

The final report will have around 125 recommendations divided into various sections including curriculum development, curriculum management, and program directions for various levels. In one broad area, standards, we are recommending increased graduation requirements, moving from a nineteen credit plan for four years to a twenty-two credit plan for four years. The new plan would require four years

of English, three years of social studies, two years of math, two years of science, two years of health and physical education, and one-half credit each in fine and practical arts. It was the feeling of our task force that it is important to expect more of our students and to expect all of our students to be educated in all important fields of knowledge.

The issue of weighted grades was a number one concern for our students, along with the related issues of class rank, admission to colleges, and recognition for students who accept a higher level of challenge in their high school careers. We are recommending weighted grades for Advanced Placement courses, and reporting class rank in deciles. Colleges said it was more important to report accurate information about the level of challenge in courses than to have the exact class rank. In relation to the challenge issue, we have also proposed a distinguished scholar program to recognize students who achieve to high standards in their high school work.

The linkages among disciplines need to be strengthened. Instruction in math, science, and technology should be planned cooperatively. Different departmental groupings in the secondary schools and supervisory groupings could facilitate this integrated planning.

We will recommend a high priority to communication, with the highest priority to writing. One possible way to improve writing is to provide a writing assessment program and to keep writing samples from all of our students.

Some futurists believe that literacy in the future means command of the English language, at least one foreign language, and computer language. Computer literacy is one of the major areas for development in our program. We are recommending increased speed in the implementation of computers within the high schools, both for instruction and for management.

Technology is currently having a tremendous impact on vocational programs. We need to find a way to prepare our students appropriately for the jobs that are going to be available. Predictions indicate that by the year 2000 only three percent of our citizens will be working in jobs that require manipulative skills. Work is going to exist only for those who can think, communicate, and use their minds with confidence. We have also recommended an emphasis on cooperative job training, since that provides the most realistic experience at a lower cost. We need to strengthen and streamline vocational programs and eliminate overlap where it exists so that programs can be effectively communicated and supported.

Quality control of curriculum and instruction is a vital issue, along with staff development. Effective implementation of a curriculum plan of this kind must consider staff development, planning, and time. Inherent in the School Board's commitment to this study is support for long-term development in the changes that will take place.

A question and answer period followed.